EVALUATION REPORT

Achieving the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health

Field Office: ID 120 Evaluation Date(s): September 30, 2009
Grazing Allotment Name/Number: Camas Creek Pocket 0807
Name of Permittee(s): Joseph Black & Sons (GRN# 1100235)

INTRODUCTION:

The Camas Creek Pocket Allotment is located south of the Mud Flat Road along the access road to the Big Springs Ranch. It consists primarily of federal land, but includes a few small corners of private land primarily where boundary fences are off line. In several places, the existing fence locations allow access to water sources on adjoining private land controlled by Joseph Black & Sons, the permittee. Joseph Black & Sons also have a water right for stock water from Pole Creek on land owned by Arva Hunt at the northwest corner of the allotment. A water gap provides access from the allotment. The Anthill Pipeline (#5093) provides water to the northeastern part of the allotment.

This allotment is used in conjunction with the Joseph Black & Sons permits in the Big Springs and Black FFR allotments. It includes 3,630 federal acres. The original 1969 Rangeline Agreement establishing Camas Creek Pocket included only the current boundaries within the former Castle Creek Allotment. The Camas Creek Pocket Allotment map accompanying the 1987 Memorandum of Agreement for Livestock Management also included another fenced parcel of federal land that is isolated by Black's Desert Field base property (pasture 1). However, the Bruneau Management Framework Plan (MFP) considered that parcel to be within the adjoining Big Springs Allotment and not within the Camas Creek Pocket. It is currently grazed in conjunction with Black's Dry Field.

The federal lands in the Camas Creek Pocket (E4) are grazed primarily in late summer and fall after cattle are removed from Big Springs, as they have been for many years. 449 AUMs are permitted during July 1 through November 15 annually, which was permanently increased from 375 AUMs in 1997. Since 1993, they have been grazed in rotation with several other primarily private fields under the Joseph Black & Sons Holistic Resource Management plan. The other pastures in the rotation include the Camas Creek Fields (E1), the Desert Field (E2), and the Dry Field (E3). The southern ¼ mile wide strip of federal land containing the irrigation ditches within Camas Creek Pocket Allotment has been fenced into a pasture designated as the Arena Field (E7), improving control of access to the water. The timing, intensity, and frequency of use are planned each year to reduce repetition of the same impact in successive years.

The allotment is located on a plateau characterized by shallow swales alternating with rhyolite ridges and outcrops. The deeper soils in swales support mountain big sagebrush/bunchgrass communities while ridges are primarily low sagebrush/ bunchgrass communities. Within this portion of the Bruneau Field Office, mountain mahogany groves typically occur on the rock outcrops. A few juniper are also present. The swales lack stream channels or springs supporting riparian communities. Mud Flat milkvetch, a BLM sensitive plant species, also occurs within the allotment.

STANDARDS APPLICABLE:

Standards 1, 4, and 8 (sensitive plants) are applicable to the Camas Creek Pocket Allotment.

An Evaluation is conducted to arrive at two outcomes (H-4180-1 page I-3):

- Firstly, an Evaluation conducts an analysis and interpretation of the findings resulting from the Assessment, relative to land health Standards, to evaluate the degree of achievement of land health Standards.

- Secondly, an Evaluation conducts an analysis and interpretation of information – be it observations or data from inventories and monitoring – on the causal factors for not achieving a land health Standard. An Evaluation of the suspected causal factors provides the foundation for a Determination.

BLM is further directed to evaluate all the data for each subdivided unit (i.e. allotment, watershed) to identify cause-effect relationships and draw conclusions about whether or not each Standard is being met for the Evaluation area as a whole (H-4180-1 page III-10).

EVALUATE STANDARDS

Standard 1 (Watersheds) ☐ Standard doesn't apply

Watersheds provide for the proper infiltration, retention, and release of water appropriate to soil type, vegetation, climate, and landform to provide for proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling, and energy flow. Indicators may include, but are not limited to the following:

- The amount and distribution of ground cover, including litter, for identified ecological site(s) or soil-plant associations are appropriate for site stability.

- Evidence of accelerated erosion in the form of rills and/or gullies, erosional pedestals, flow patterns, physical soil crusts/surface sealing, and compaction layers below the soil surface is minimal for soil type and landform.

Related Management Framework Plan (MFP) Objectives:

WS 1: Maintain stability of 408,300 acres of moderate . . . erosion hazard classes by reducing or minimizing wind and water erosion.

Related Management Framework Plan (MFP) Decisions:

WS-1.1: Minimize erosion by maintaining good perennial vegetation cover where it exists and where feasible/economical strive for establishing perennial vegetation cover to benefit all uses. If not feasible/economical to establish perennial vegetation manage to achieve stable watershed conditions.

WS-1.2: Minimize soil erosion of all surface disturbance activities through proper timing with regards to soil moisture content. All projects and/or authorized uses will consider soil erosion both on-site and off-site.

Evaluation and Information Sources:

Rangeland Health: Three rangeland health evaluations were completed in the Camas Creek Pocket allotment during June, 2004. Based upon these evaluations, and field visits in June and

July of 2009, the allotment appears to be stable, and capable of supporting proper watershed functions. Moderate water flow patterns were noted in two of the three evaluation areas, and were associated with slopes. Flow patterns and associated pedestals appeared to have stabilized; very limited soil loss or degradation was noted. The plant community includes a diversity of structural groups capable of protecting the soil surface while facilitating proper hydrologic function, nutrient cycling and energy flow. Overall, indicators related to watershed function displayed a slight to moderate departure from reference conditions at two of the evaluation sites, and none to a slight departure at the third site. This allotment appears to be meeting Standard 1, and is supporting proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling and energy flow within the greater watershed area.

Rangeland Health Changes: Deep-rooted bunchgrasses in this allotment are slightly below site potential, but trend data indicate that populations are stable. Western juniper are encroaching on the evaluation sites, but are not negatively affecting hydrologic cycling or watershed function. Limited basal cover trend data are available for 2009 and 1987, respectively. Bare ground is static, live vegetation has increased, as have increaser grasses; decreaser grasses are static, and biotic crust is static and very low. Litter was not recorded consistently in the two samplings.

Livestock Grazing Management: Although utilization of Idaho fescue and bluebunch wheatgrass was heavy at the trend site (65%) in 2005, little evidence of livestock use was noted during a July, 2009 field visit. Also, the Use Pattern Map prepared concurrently with the 2005 transect showed that only preferred big sagebrush communities within the service area of the Pole Creek water gap and the Anthill troughs received moderate or greater use. Use is deferred until after seed ripe each year, and current livestock use appears to be compatible with attainment of Standard 1.

Information Sources: Rangeland Health Evaluations, Site Photos, Field Visits, Nested Plot Frequency Trend Data.

Evaluation Finding - Allotment/watershed is:

_X_ Meeting the Standard

____ Not meeting the Standard, but making significant progress towards meeting

____ Not meeting the Standard

Rationale for Evaluation Finding
This allotment is meeting Standard 1, and is supporting proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling and energy flow within the greater watershed area.

Standard 2 (Riparian Areas and Wetlands) ■ Standard doesn't apply

Standard 3 (Stream Channel/Flood Plain) ■ Standard doesn't apply

Standard 4 (Native Plant Communities) ☐ Standard doesn't apply

Healthy, productive, and diverse native animal habitat and populations of native plants are maintained or promoted as appropriate to soil type, climate, and landform to provide for proper

nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling, and energy flow. Indicators may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Native plant communities (flora and microbiotic crusts) are maintained or improved to ensure the proper functioning of ecological processes and continued productivity and diversity of native plant species.

- The diversity of native species is maintained.

- Plant vigor (total plant production, seed and seedstalk production, cover, etc.) is adequate to enable reproduction and recruitment of plants when favorable climatic events occur.

- Noxious weeds are not increasing.

- Adequate litter and standing dead plant material are present for site protection and for decomposition to replenish soil nutrients relative to site potential.

Related Management Framework Plan (MFP) Objectives:

RM 1: Maintain the condition class of 283,849 acres currently in good and excellent condition.

RM 3: Allocate livestock forage in each of the allotments in the Bruneau Planning Unit (BPU) within the limits necessary to maintain and/or enhance the range and soil resource.

WL 3: Manage 1,143,000 acres of big game habitat in the BPU . . . to obtain good ecological condition.

Related Management Framework Plan (MFP) Decisions:

RM 1.1 (2): Implement less intensive management on 5 allotments.

RM 3.1: Initial livestock use levels by allotment will be established at the five-year licensed active use levels from the years 1976-80 or by mutual agreement. Any subsequent increase or reduction in AUMs . . . will be based upon monitoring and other resource needs as identified in this MFP . . .Increase livestock use levels from 375 to 525 AUMs over a 5 year implementation period based upon monitoring. [this was partially implemented beginning in 1988, with a 75 AUM increase becoming permanent in 1997.]

WL 3.2: Manage 1,106,000 acres of mule deer spring, summer, and fall range in the BPU . . . so there is adequate food, cover, and water for 2,155 animals by 1990. Specifically:

- Implement livestock grazing systems and practices that recognize the physiological requirements of forbs and shrubs . . .
- Allow no more than 50% total utilization of the current annual production of key shrub species by all classes of animals combined.

WL 3.3: Manage 1,079,000 acres in the BPU as pronghorn habitat . . . to provide sufficient forage, water, cover, and space for 1,175 animals by 1990. Specifically:

- Manage habitat for good ecological condition where feasible/economical.

WL 4.3: Manage springs, seeps, and meadows and adjacent upland areas as key wildlife habitats for upland game. Specifically:

- Control livestock grazing on these habitats by the implementation of grazing systems, season of use and other management practices.

Evaluation and Information Sources:

Rangeland Health: Rangeland Health Evaluation Summary worksheets were completed in the Camas Creek Pocket during June through September, 2004. Prior to the evaluations, the area experienced a dry winter followed by above-normal precipitation during May and June, 2004. The attribute ratings for Standard 4 were none to slight departure from reference conditions for two of the three evaluation sites, and slight to moderate departure for the third site. The slight to moderate departure rating was due to a shift in the functional/structural groups present at the site. This shift has resulted in an increase in structurally smaller, shallower rooted bunchgrasses, and a slight decline in deeper-rooted bunchgrasses, such as Idaho fescue and bluebunch wheatgrass. However, the site is still supporting a diverse, vigorous plant community, and is meeting Standard 4 by providing for proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling, and energy flow.

Site visits in July, 2009 showed substantial mortality of bitterbrush due to defoliation by tent caterpillars. Juniper has increased through much of the allotment, though shrubs and bunchgrass are still the dominant vegetation components.

Rangeland Health Changes: Trend data from 1987 and 2009 are available for one nested plot frequency trend site in the Camas Creek Pocket Allotment. Sandberg bluegrass increased significantly between 1987 and 2009, while bluebunch wheatgrass frequency decreased. However, Idaho fescue and Thurber's needlegrass frequencies remained high. Big sagebrush frequency also declined significantly, though cover appears to be relatively constant due to the increased size of mature shrubs. The most notable change was a large increase in frequency of lupine (from 19% to 64%). Some variation in lupine frequency between these years may be due to reading the site in late August in 1987 when plants were senescent, and in late June in 2009, when plants were actively growing.

Livestock Grazing Management: Little evidence of livestock use was noted during a July, 2009 field visit. Current livestock use appears to be compatible with maintenance of the native plant community and attainment of Standard 4.

Information Sources: Rangeland Health Evaluation Summary Worksheets (2004), Soils and ESI data (1981).

Evaluation Finding - Allotment/watershed is:

_X_ Meeting the Standard

____ Not meeting the Standard, but making significant progress towards meeting

____ Not meeting the Standard

Rationale for Evaluation Finding
This allotment is supporting a diverse, vigorous plant community, and is meeting Standard 4 by providing for proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling, and energy flow.

Standard 5 (Seedings) ■ Standard doesn't apply

Standard 6 (Exotic Plant Communities, other than Seedings) ■ Standard doesn't apply

Standard 7 (Water Quality) ■ Standard doesn't apply

Standard 8 (Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals) ☐ Standard doesn't apply

Habitats are suitable to maintain viable populations of threatened and endangered, sensitive, and other special status species. Indicators may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Parameters described in the Idaho Water Quality Standards
- Riparian/wetland vegetation with deep, strong, binding roots is sufficient to stabilize streambanks and shorelines. Invader and shallow-rooted species are a minor component of the floodplain.
- Age class and structural diversity of riparian/wetland vegetation are appropriate for the site.
- Native plant communities (flora and microbiotic crusts) are maintained or improved to ensure the proper functioning of ecological processes and continued productivity and diversity of native plant species.
- The diversity of native species is maintained.
- The amount and distribution of ground cover, including litter, for identified ecological site(s) or soil-plant associations are appropriate for site stability.
- Noxious weeds are not increasing.

Related Management Framework Plan (MFP) Objectives:

WL 1: Protect and/or improve endangered species habitat within the BPU.

WL 2: Manage sensitive species habitats to maintain or increase existing or potential populations.

WL 4: Manage upland game and waterfowl habitats in the BPU to increase populations of these highly desired species.

RM 5: Provide for protection and conservation of rare and endangered plants within the planning unit.

Related Management Framework Plan (MFP) Decisions:

WL 4.4: Manage 520,000 acres of sage grouse range in the BPU . . . to improve nesting, brood rearing and winter habitats. Specifically:

- To improve . . . sage grouse nesting and brood rearing habitats, all poor and fair big sagebush . . . ecological sites should be improved and managed for good ecological condition.

RM 5.1: Manage all lands in a manner which will provide or enhance rare and endangered plants where they exist throughout the planning unit (BLM regulation and policy).

Special Status Animals

Evaluation and Information Sources:

Rangeland Health: Camas Creek Pocket meets the standard for wildlife. It is in excellent habitat condition with varied and vigorous native grasses and forbs, and healthy stands of big sage and mountain mahogany. A sage grouse breeding habitat assessment showed excellent sage, grass and forb canopy cover and height. It is one of the best condition pieces of land in the mahogany savannah. Additionally, pygmy rabbit burrows have been observed in this allotment. An issue unrelated to grazing but having the potential to affect wildlife is a widespread defoliation of bitterbrush by tent caterpillars that was detected within the allotment during July 2009.

Rangeland Health Changes: No information.

Livestock Grazing Management: The late use in most years is probably responsible for the good condition.

Information Sources:

- Sage grouse lek (mating ground) surveys by helicopter in April-May 2004 and 2009
- IDFG sage grouse historical lek database, 2003
- Sage grouse habitat assessment 2005 and 2009
- Pygmy Rabbit Surveys 2005
- Conservation Data Center Rare Species database
- General wildlife field observations in 2005 and 2009

Evaluation Finding - Allotment/watershed is:

_X_ Meeting the Standard

____ Not meeting the Standard, but making significant progress towards meeting

____ Not meeting the Standard

Rationale for Evaluation Finding: It is one of the best condition habitats in the mahogany savannah, and perhaps in the Bruneau Field Office.

Special Status Plants

Evaluation and Information Sources:

Rangeland Health: There is one BLM Special Status Plant species (SSP), Mud Flat milkvetch (*Astragalus yoder-williamsii*), a Type 3 BLM SSP, known to occur in the Camas Creek Pocket. Two populations of this SSP have been located in this pasture and the standard was met for both, with habitat quality assessed as good to excellent.

Rangeland Health Changes: Initial observations of Mud Flat milkvetch, which occurred in 1992 and 1995, indicated that the populations were healthy and reproductively capable. Some plants were located within or adjacent to roadbeds. Roadwork and increased cattle trailing along roads are potential threats to some of the plants that are located closer to roads. During follow-up site visits to these populations in 2005 and 2009, the milkvetch populations in this pasture were reported to have excellent population vigor. Habitat quality was good to excellent.

Livestock Grazing Management: This plant is rarely eaten by cows due to its small stature, however impacts from livestock grazing have been reported from concentrated use (Mancuso & Moseley 1993), such as water developments, troughs, or salting sites within ¼ mile of existing populations. However, during site visits in 2005 and 2009 negative impacts to these populations were not observed.

Information Sources: Species specific site-visits to known populations of special status plants and historical population information on file at the BLM. Locations of known populations of SSP were identified using the Idaho Fish & Game Conservation Data Center (CDC) database and field office maps. Data for species listed on the 2004 BLM sensitive species list were collected. A portion of this pasture was surveyed for Mud Flat milkvetch (*Astragalus yoder-williamsii*) in 1995. Only known populations of BLM SSP occurring in the Camas Creek Pocket pasture were analyzed. Known populations in this pasture were revisited during the spring and summer of 2004, 2005 and 2009.

Evaluation Finding - Allotment/watershed is:

_X_ Meeting the Standard

____ Not meeting the Standard, but making significant progress towards meeting

____ Not meeting the Standard

Rationale for Evaluation Finding: Standard 8 is being met in this pasture for SSP. The known populations of Mud Flat milkvetch in this pasture were reported to have excellent population vigor and habitat quality was also assessed as good to excellent.

SECTION 1 – IS A DETERMINATION REQUIRED?

_X_ All Standards are met or making significant progress towards meeting and there is conformance with the guidelines. **No Determination is required, review is complete.**

___ One or more Standards is not being met or there is non-conformance with the guidelines. **An Authorized Officer's Determination is required; continue with Section 2.**

/s/ Arnold L. Pike — 9/30/09

Field Manager — Date